

# *Research on the Cultural Underpinnings of Chinese Modernization in Mencius' Thought of "Benevolent Government"*

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**Abstract:** Chinese excellent traditional culture is the cultural root and spiritual core of Chinese modernization. Mencius' thought of "benevolent government" is one of the treasures of Chinese excellent traditional culture, which is put forward with a profound background of the times, "the theory of goodness of nature" as its key ethical foundation, "the way of the former king" as its main historical background, and the upheaval of the social order and the contention of a hundred schools of thought in the cultural field are its important practical basis. Nurturing and educating the people were the main elements of Mencius' thought of "benevolent government," which aimed to alleviate class conflicts and maintain the stability of the social order. Nowadays, the glory of Mencius' idea of "benevolent government" still shines brightly, and his wisdom is highly compatible with the connotation of Chinese modernization, providing a fertile cultural soil and source of thought for the breeding and development of Chinese modernization.

## **1. Introduction**

"The Chinese modernization path is rooted in the land of China and created by sucking on the cultural nutrients accumulated by the long struggle of the Chinese nation."<sup>[1]</sup> The important reason why Chinese modernization has Chinese style, Chinese characteristics and Chinese style is that it is deeply rooted in the fertile soil of excellent traditional Chinese culture. Mencius' idea of "benevolent government" is the essence of Chinese civilization in the long history of five thousand years, this paper will focus on the background and main content of Mencius' thought of "benevolent government", and actively explore the cultural heritage of Chinese modernization.

## **2. The background of the era in which Mencius' thought of "benevolent government" was put forward.**

"People's social existence determines people's social consciousness"<sup>[2]591</sup>. Factors such as "the theory of goodness of nature", "the way of the former king", the turbulent social order of the Warring States period and the hundred schools of thought in the cultural field provided the ethical basis for the formation of Mencius' idea of "benevolent government". The "doctrine of the goodness

of nature”, “the way of the late king”, the turbulent social order of the Warring States period, and the hundred schools of thought in the cultural field provided the ethical foundation, historical basis, and practical basis, respectively, for the formation of the idea of Mencius' “benevolent government”, as shown in Figure 1:

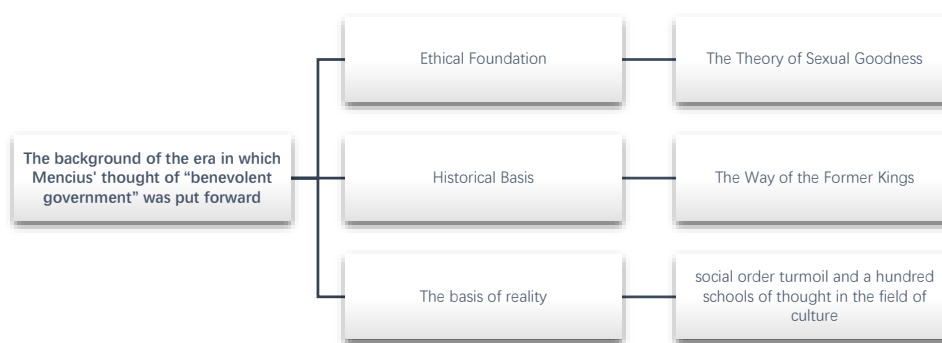


Figure 1: Analysis of the Background of the Formation of Mencius' Benevolent Governance Thought

## 2.1 Ethical Foundation: “The Theory of Sexual Goodness”

Mencius had a profound debate with Gaozi about the goodness and evil of human nature. Gaozi believed that human nature is not absolutely good or evil, emphasizing the complexity and plasticity of human nature. Mencius advocated that human nature is good, just as water always flows downward. In addition, Mencius had a discussion with Gongsun Chou about the goodness of human nature. In the argument, Mencius proposed, “all people have the heart of not tolerating others. The first king had the heart of intolerance, and then he had the policy of intolerance. With the heart of the intolerant, the government of the intolerant, the rule of the world can be transported to the palm of the hand.”<sup>[3]69</sup> Here, Mencius believed that all people have the heart of compassion, and even pointed out that the reason why the ancient saint kings practiced the politics of sympathy for the people was because they had the heart of compassion. In short, we can draw a conclusion from Mencius' debate with Gongsun Chou and Gaozi about the goodness and evil of human nature, that is, the “theory of sexual goodness” provided the ethical foundation for the implementation of “benevolent government” by the late kings, and the implementation of “benevolent government” was also in line with the principle of “humane government”. The implementation of “benevolent government” also conformed to the human nature proposition of “the theory of sexual goodness”, and the two complemented each other.

## 2.2 Historical Basis: “The Way of the Former Kings”

“The Way of the former King' is the historical basis of Mencius' idea of 'benevolent government’”<sup>[4]</sup>. What is the “way of the former Kings”? As the name suggests, it is the way of governance of the ancient sage kings. The “former kings” refer to Yao, Shun, Yu, Shang Tang, Zhou Wenwang, Zhou Wuwang, and otherwise kings. Mencius praised the way of the late kings many times, pointing out: “Yu hated wine and was good at talking. Tang was a man of the center, and he was a man of the wise. King Wen regarded the people as if they were hurt and looked to the road without seeing it. King Wu did not forget the near and the far. The Duke of Zhou thought of combining the three kings in order to implement the four affairs; if he did not fit in, he looked up and thought about it, night and day; if he was fortunate enough to get it, he sat down and waited for the day.”<sup>[3]179</sup> But Jie and Zhou did not commit themselves to establishing a benevolent government and endlessly

expropriated the people, thus suffering the hatred of the people. King Zhou's tyrannical abuse of the people made the people's grievances so deep that they revolted. King Yue's tyrannical rule forbade the people to enter the rivers, lakes and forests, prohibited them from fishing and hunting, and forbade them to talk about national affairs, which was unbearable to the people, so they revolted, captured Kyoto, destroyed the palace, and King Yue was expelled. The above historical facts, by comparing the positive and negative sides, fully prove that only by implementing the “benevolent government” and loving the people can the ruler unify the world.

### 2.3 The basis of reality: social order turmoil and a hundred schools of thought in the field of culture

On the one hand, the Warring States period was characterized by frequent wars, and people not only suffered from the ravages of war, but also from the oppression of autocracy. Based on the experience of class struggle in the past, Mencius proposed the implementation of “benevolent government”, the fundamental purpose of which was to solve the production and living problems of the people, to promote the well-being of the people, to alleviate the social conflicts, and to maintain the ruling order of the feudal society. On the other hand, a hundred schools of thought competed in the cultural field. The turbulent political situation during the Warring States period provided fertile soil for the prosperity of thought and culture. The increasingly fierce competition among the vassal states required capable rulers to come up with effective strategies. As a result, many schools of thought, including Confucianism, Mohism, Taoism, Legalism, the School of War, and the School of Yin-Yang, put forward their own unique insights, and the schools criticized each other, which made the ideological and cultural prosperity possible.

### 3. The main content of Mencius' thought of “benevolent government”.

Mencius's thought of “benevolent government” mainly includes two aspects, namely, raising the people and teaching the people. Raising the people mainly includes “making the people's production constant”, “keeping the people in time”, and “taking the people in a systematic way”, while teaching the people is mainly embodied in the “four virtues” and the “five ethics”, as shown in Figure 2:

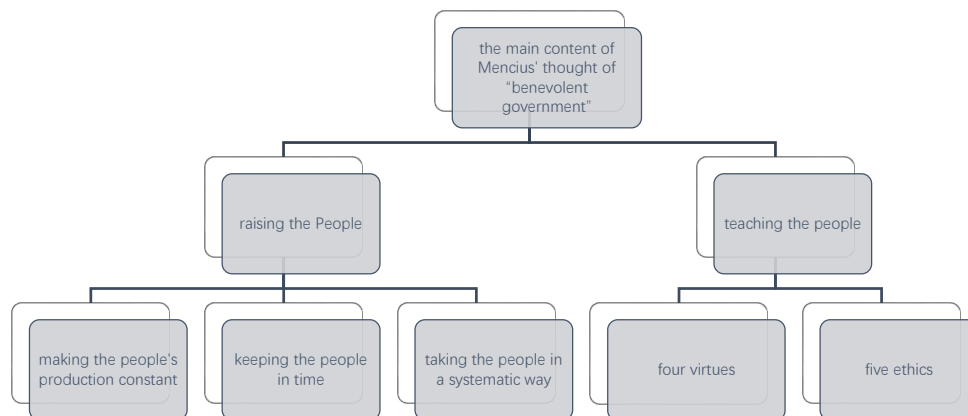


Figure 2: Analysis of the Main Content of Mencius' Benevolent Governance Thought

### 3.1 Raising the People – “Making the People Produce Constantly, Keeping the People in Time, and Taking from the People in a Systematic Manner”

Firstly, “making the people's production constant” is the fundamental measure for the nourishment of the people. In the view of Mencius, “If the people do not have constant production, they do not have constant mind. If there is no perseverance, there is no reason why they should not be able to do what they want to do. And caught in the crime, and then thus the penalty, is reckless people also <sup>[3]15</sup>, that is, if the people do not have a fixed property, there will be no benevolence and righteousness, and accordingly will not be subject to the constraints of laws and regulations, which will lead the people to go astray on the path of crime. It can be seen that Mencius clearly recognized that the people's lack of constant property was an important root cause of their crimes. Mencius believed that a wise monarch would not let the people be forced to commit crimes because of their livelihood, and that the people should be guaranteed a certain amount of property in order to provide a certain material basis for the support of their parents, wives, and children, and then be urged to do good deeds, which would be conducive to the people's obedience to his rule and the consolidation of the great cause of the unification of the world.

Secondly, “keeping the people in time” is an important principle in raising the people. The so-called ‘keeping the people in time’ meant that the ruler should use the people's power according to the agricultural season, so as to avoid affecting the people's agricultural production and destroying the people's living environment. Because of the wars in the middle of the Warring States period, the rulers often conscripted the people to go out to war, which led to the abandonment of farmland and the serious destruction of agricultural production, and it was difficult for the people to satisfy the basic material security, and then they would try their best to ask for the fishery resources. At the same time, the rulers built the palaces and mausoleums, and so on, and made a lot of construction and logging of the forests, which were contrary to the objective of the people's nourishment. Therefore, Mencius put forward three specific requirements for “making the people in time”, namely, “if you don't go against the farming season, the grain can't be eaten out; if dense nets do not go down to the ponds, the fish and turtles can't be eaten out; if you go into the mountains and the forests at the right time, the forests and the trees can't be used up.” <sup>[3]5</sup>

Thirdly, “taking the people in a systematic manner” is the basis for raising the people. The so-called “taking from the people in a controlled manner” means that the ruler should be restrained in the taxes he levies on the people, and should not be indiscriminately overcharged. Mencius put forward, “a wise ruler must be respectful and thrifty, and take from the people in a controlled manner.” <sup>[3]104</sup> The reason is that if the tax is too heavy, the people will not be able to survive; and if the tax is too low, although it can reduce the burden of the people, it is difficult to afford the huge financial expenditure of the government organ. Therefore, Mencius advocated the implementation of the tithe tax system, i.e., to levy taxes at a rate of ten per cent, that is, the Xia Dynasty, each family of fifty acres of land for the tribute law, the Shang Dynasty, each family of seventy acres of land for the help law, the Zhou Dynasty, each family of seventy acres of land for the help law, and each family of the ‘help’ law, the Zhou Dynasty, each family of the help law. In the Xia Dynasty, each family had 50 mu of land for the ‘tribute’ law, in the Shang Dynasty, each family had 70 mu of land for the ‘aid’ law, and in the Zhou Dynasty, each family had 100 mu of land for the Che law, which were in essence one-tenth of the tax rate. In addition, Mencius also advocated the elimination of the levy of Guan-shi, but Dai Yingzhi, a great minister of the state of Song, said, “I cannot do it now”, and “I need to wait for the coming year”. In short, Mencius endeavored to implement the tithe tax system and to remove the customs and market levies, with a view to reducing the taxes levied on the people and thus achieving the good goal of raising the people.

### 3.2 Teaching the People – “Four Virtues” and “Five Ethics”

The ‘four virtues’ include the four moral qualities of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom. What is the foundation of the four virtues? Mencius pointed out that “compassion, the end of benevolence; shame, the end of righteousness; resignation, the end of propriety; right and wrong, the end of wisdom” <sup>[3]69</sup>, indicating that the “four hearts” is the beginning of the “four virtues”. Benevolence is the first of the “four virtues”. Mencius discussed the consequences of not being benevolent from the perspectives of the Son of Heaven, the vassals, the officials, and the common people to illustrate the importance of benevolence, i.e., “if the Son of Heaven is not benevolent, he will not be able to protect the four seas; if the vassals are not benevolent, they will not be able to protect the gods of earth and grain; if the ministers are not benevolent, they will not protect the temple; if the common people are not benevolent, they will not protect the four bodies.”<sup>[3]149</sup> At the same time, righteousness is the embodiment of benevolence in the practical dimension, which is the path to be followed in doing things for people, just as Mencius says As Mencius said, ‘everyone has something he does not want to do, and to achieve what he wants to do is righteousness’<sup>[3]335</sup>. That is to say, everyone has something he does not want to do, and to extend it to what he wants to do is righteousness. According to Mencius, when life conflicts with righteousness, it must give way to righteousness. In addition, “propriety” is the external expression of “benevolence” and “righteousness”. Mencius emphasized that “without rites and righteousness, the top and bottom will be in chaos”. It can be seen that in Mencius' thinking, “rites” represent the behavioral norms that regulate interactions between people, aiming at establishing harmonious interpersonal relationships and maintaining the stability of social order. And “wisdom” stands for intelligence. According to Mencius, “The reality of benevolence is to serve one's relatives; the reality of righteousness is to follow one's brother. The essence of wisdom is to know these two things and not to go against them; the essence of ritual is to regulate these two things.”<sup>[3]167</sup> That is to say, the essence of benevolence is to serve one's relatives and follow one's elder brother, while the essence of wisdom is to know these two things and not to go against them, and the essence of ritual is to modify and regulate these two things. It can be seen that the four moral qualities of benevolence, righteousness, propriety and wisdom are not independent individuals, but are closely related and mutually reinforcing unities.

The “five ethics” refer to the five human relationships of ruler and subject, father and son, brother, husband and wife, and friend. Mencius pointed out the corresponding ways to get along with these five relationships, namely, “father and son have kinship, ruler and minister have righteousness, husband and wife have distinction, elders and children have order, and friends have faith.”<sup>[3]111</sup> Firstly, ‘father and son have kinship’ means that parents and children should be dear to each other, parents should raise and educate their children, and parents should be responsible for their children's upbringing and education. Firstly, ‘father and son have kinship’ means that parents and children should be dear to each other, parents should raise and educate their children, and children should be grateful to their parents, and filial piety is the concentrated manifestation of repaying parents, just as what Mencius said, “Which is the greatest thing? Serving one's parents is the greatest.” <sup>[3]163</sup> Secondly, ‘the ruler and his subjects have righteousness,’ which refers to the need for propriety and righteousness between the ruler and his subjects. Mencius once told King Xuan of Qi, “if the ruler regards his ministers as his hands and feet, then his ministers regard the ruler as his heart; if the ruler regards his ministers as his dogs and horses, then his ministers regard the ruler as his countrymen; if the ruler regards his ministers as dirt and mustard, then his ministers regard the ruler as a collateral.”<sup>[3]171</sup> This clearly expresses Mencius's view on the relationship between the ruler and his ministers, which holds that the relationship between the ruler and his ministers requires a certain degree of propriety and righteousness to be maintained, and this propriety and righteousness needs to be maintained in both directions. Thirdly, “husband and wife are distinct”

means that there should be a distinction between internal and external affairs between husband and wife. In ancient times, husbands were the main source of economic production and material security for their families, while wives were responsible for dealing with the internal affairs of the family and had to respect and obey their husbands, as the saying goes, “the way of a concubine and a woman is to be obedient to her husband”<sup>[3]125</sup>. However, Mencius did not intend to advocate the inferiority of men but rather to reflect the inherent notions of the patriarchal society of the time. Fourthly, “the order of elders and children” means that there should be an order of seniority and inferiority between elders and children. According to Mencius, “the one who walks slowly after the elder is called the younger brother, and the one who walks quickly before the elder is called the younger brother.”<sup>[3]265</sup> That is to say, letting the elder walk in front of the younger one is a sign of respect, while walking in front of the elder is a sign of disrespect. From this, it can be understood that Mencius stressed that the young should distinguish the order of honor and inferiority, and observe the corresponding norms of etiquette. Fifthly, friends have faith, that is, friends should be honest in their dealings with each other. Mencius believes that “do not trust friends, not to get on it”<sup>[3]157</sup>, it can be said that ‘trust’ is an important measure of a person's standard of behavior.

#### 4. The Cultural Underpinnings of Chinese Modernization in Mencius' Thought of “Benevolent Governance”

“Many ideological concepts and ethical norms in the excellent traditional Chinese culture, whether in the past or at present, have a timeless value.”<sup>[5]</sup> The people-centered concept, the principle of adapting to the season, and the concept of ‘raising and then teaching’ in Mencius' thought of “benevolent governance” are closely related to the concepts of people, ecology, and development embedded in Chinese modernization, and provide fruitful cultural nourishment for the nurturing and development of Chinese modernization, as shown in Figure 3:

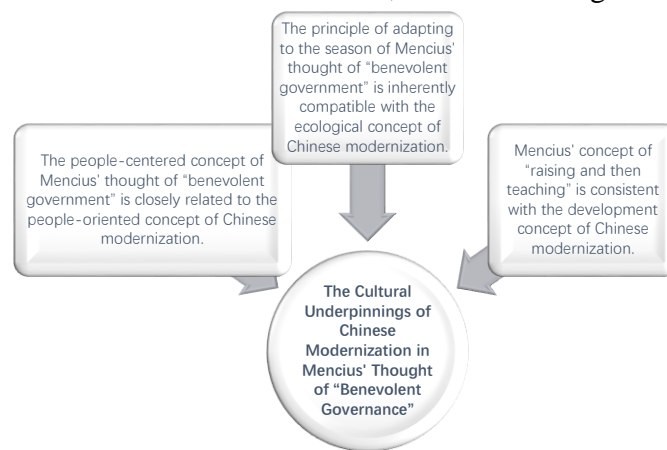


Figure 3: The Relationship between Mencius' Benevolent Governance Thought and Chinese Modernization.

##### 4.1 The people-centered concept of Mencius' thought of “benevolent government” is closely related to the people-centered concept of Chinese modernization.

“Chinese modernization is a people-centered development model”<sup>[6]</sup>, a modernization that embodies the power and value of the human subject, which is the same as the “people-centered” concept embedded in Mencius' thought of “benevolent government”. Mencius believed that “the people are the most important thing, the gods of earth and grain come second, and the king is the least important thing”<sup>[3]324</sup>, placing the people's position at the top of the list of the state and the



king. In addition, he drew a positive and negative comparison by citing the deeds of Xia Jie and Shang Zhou, as well as those of Shang Tang and Zhou Wen Wang, to conclude that whoever wins the hearts of the people wins the world. Then, Mencius put the concept of the people into concrete real-life areas, taking into account the people's immediate interests from multiple dimensions, in order to better maintain the ruling order. For example, in the content of "Nourishing the People", "making the people's production constant" aims to ensure that the people have the necessary means of living and production to sustain their daily lives, "keeping the people in season" advocates that the ruler should obey the rhythms of law and order and require the people to observe seasonality and moderation, and the 'systematic taking of the people' emphasizes that the ruler should adhere to the principle of moderation in taxing the people, i.e., he should take into account the criteria for the functioning of the state institutions, while also caring about the people's basic subsistence. In addition, the 'four Virtues' and the 'five ethics' in the 'Teaching the People' advocate the ritual education of the people, focusing on the enhancement of their inner cultivation and the construction of social ethics and morality. The Marxist view of the masses emphasizes that the people are the main body of history and the decisive force for social change. In *The Holy Family*, Engels talked about that "Historical activity is the activity of the masses, and with the deepening of historical activity will certainly be the expansion of the ranks of the masses."<sup>[7]287</sup> In the course of the Party's century-long history, the masses have been the protagonists of history, the source of strength and the foundation of the Party's unity in leading the Chinese nation to create one great achievement after another: it was thanks to the countless benevolent and aspiring men and women who were indomitable and sacrificed their lives for the sake of making various attempts to save the country in order to overthrow imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, that the great achievements of the New Democratic Revolution were seized; it was because the people were self-reliant and vigorous with their own labor and wisdom, and actively devoted themselves to the socialist revolution and construction, that the situation of the early days of the founding of the country, which was fraught with problems and in disarray, was reversed, and the great achievements of the socialist revolution and construction were made; it was precisely because of the emancipation of the minds of the people, and their determination to forge ahead, that they were able to push the Chinese nation forward in the great transformation from standing up to becoming rich, and to create the great achievements of the reform and opening up and socialist modernization; it is because of the people's emancipation and enterprising spirit that the Chinese nation has made a great transformation from standing up to getting rich, and created the great achievements of reform and opening up and socialist modernization; it is also because of the people's self-confidence and self-improvement, righteousness and innovation that our country has achieved higher-quality development in the economic, political and cultural aspects, and has created the great achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. "The development of a country and the progress of a society cannot be achieved without the wisdom, creativity, practice and dedication of the people."<sup>[8]</sup> Therefore, in order to realize, maintain and develop the fundamental interests of the broadest masses of people, we should continue and carry forward the people-oriented concept in Mencius' idea of "benevolent government", and solidly promote the construction of Chinese modernization.

#### **4.2 The principle of adapting to the season of Mencius' thought of "benevolent government" is inherently compatible with the ecological concept of Chinese modernization.**

"Chinese modernization has completed the restoration of man's naturalness and civilization"<sup>[9]</sup>. In traditional Chinese culture, the relationship between human beings and nature is not an antagonistic one of conquering and being conquered as in western traditional culture, but a

community of interdependent and mutually influential beings, “practicing the principles of ecological concepts such as ‘reverence for life,’ ‘benevolence to nature,’ ‘taking sometimes’ and ‘taking in moderation.’”<sup>[10]</sup> The importance of “time” and “nourishment” is clearly emphasized in Mencius' idea of “benevolent government”, which focuses on the seasonal growth of crops and the conservation of natural resources, highlighting the value of harmonious coexistence between human beings and nature, which is highly compatible with the ecological concept embedded in the Chinese style of modernization. “Enabling the people to be in season”, i.e., advocating that the people should observe the seasons and use them sparingly, reflects Mencius' respect for the laws of nature. He proposed, “When there is a drought in the seventh or eighth month, the seedlings will be wasted. When the sky is full of clouds and rain, the seedlings will be flourishing. If this is the case, who can defend it?”<sup>[3]11</sup> From this, we can see that Mencius believes that the power of nature is strong and irresistible, and that people should not go against the laws of nature, but should act in accordance with the times. Secondly, Mencius pointed out that “the chicken, the dog, the pig, the animal, no loss of time, seventy people can eat meat. Hundreds of acres of fields, do not take away its time, a few mouths of the family can be free from hunger,”<sup>[3]17</sup>, indicating that as long as people do not violate the natural rhythms of agricultural activities can have a rich life. In addition, he also advocated the ideas of “dense nets do not go down to the ponds” and “going into the mountains to cut wood at certain seasons”, thinking that we should pay attention to the conservation of natural resources, rather than uncontrolled exploitation. Under the conditions of capitalist market economy, the pursuit of unlimited increase in surplus value by capital has led to great damage to natural resources and the ecological environment. The Marxist view of ecology holds that “without nature, without the sensuous external world, the worker can create nothing.”<sup>[7]158</sup> It can be seen that nature is the cradle that nurtures human life, provides objective material materials for the development of human society, and becomes the real field that promotes the development of human society. In the process of using and transforming nature, human beings should follow the objective laws of nature to transform the world in order to obtain the material and energy to maintain the normal operation of society. In short, the principle of adapting to the season of Mencius' “benevolent government” provides a powerful way to solve the real problems faced by today's world, such as over-exploitation of natural resources and frequent occurrence of natural disasters, by respecting nature, adapting to nature and protecting nature. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee with General Secretary as its core has attached great importance to the construction of ecological civilization, incorporated “beauty” into the goal of socialist modernization and power, and led the Chinese nation with a series of new concepts, new ideas and new strategies to stride forward on the journey of realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the nation. Therefore, in the new era, we should continue to follow the principle of Mencius' idea of “benevolent governance”, firmly establish and practice the concept that green water and green mountains are golden silver mountains, and further promote green development, so as to contribute to the promotion of Chinese modernization with justice and science.

#### **4.3 Mencius' concept of “raising and then teaching” is consistent with the development concept of Chinese modernization.**

The harmony between material and spiritual civilization is one of the five characteristics of Chinese modernization. The dichotomy between material and spiritual civilizations is the main picture of the Western thinking world, and the result of this epistemology is the deviation of material civilization from spiritual civilization, which “forms a modernization with materialism at its core”<sup>[11]</sup>. However, Mencius's concept of “raising and then teaching” not only reflects a high regard for the material security of the people, but also a keen concern for their spiritual life, which



coincides with the principle of coordinated development of material and spiritual civilizations that Chinese modernization follows. The concept of “raising and then teaching” means that moral education is provided to the people when their material life is basically secured. Mencius firstly advocated that the people should be nourished, and that they should be ensured the basic material needs of daily life by “making the people's production constant”, “keeping the people in a timely manner”, and “taking from the people in a systematic manner”, etc. As Marx pointed out in the Preface to the Critique of Political Economy, “The mode of production of material life governs the whole process of social, political and spiritual life.”<sup>[2]591</sup> Secondly, Mencius proposed to teach the people on the basis of nourishing them. He believed that “the way of man, full of food, warm clothes, comfortable living without teaching, is close to animals”<sup>[3]111</sup>, pointing out that if people are not educated, there is no intrinsic difference between them and animals. Therefore, Mencius advocated teaching human ethics to the people, which mainly included the “four virtues” and the “five ethics” discussed in the previous section. “Modernization in harmony with material and spiritual civilization”<sup>[9]22</sup> dialectically unifies Mencius's nurturing of the people with his teaching of the people, and creatively transforms and innovatively develops it, “not only emphasizing the need to strengthen the material foundation of the people's lives by emancipating and developing the productive forces, and actively fostering the development of new productive forces, but also strengthening the construction of spiritual civilization under the guidance of socialist core values to enrich the spiritual world”.<sup>[12]</sup> From the material level, the development of new quality productive forces is the inheritance and development of Mencius' idea of nourishing the people. “The new quality productive forces is the advanced productivity quality which conforms to the new development concept”<sup>[13]</sup> Mencius' idea of raising the people not only focuses on material production in agriculture, forestry, fisheries and other fields to achieve the goal of enriching the people, but also requires that material production should respect and follow the natural rhythms in order to maintain a dynamic balance between human beings and nature, which reflects Mencius' emphasis on the sustainability of production, which is highly compatible with the green development undertone of new quality productive forces in the new era. From the spiritual level, Mencius' idea of teaching the people is coupled with socialist core values. “Enriching the people's spiritual world”<sup>[9]23</sup> is one of the essential requirements of Chinese modernization, and socialist core values are an important ideological resource for nourishing the people's spiritual world. From the national level, the content of socialist core values includes wealth and strength, democracy, civilization and harmony, and “benevolence” among the “four virtues” is an important guarantee for their realization. According to Mencius, if the Son of Heaven is not benevolent, he will lose the world, and if the vassals are not benevolent, the country will decline. It can be seen that only when one has a benevolent heart can one practice benevolent governance and thus preserve the world and the country. From the social level, the socialist core values include freedom, equality, justice, and the rule of law, and there are resources for the creative transformation of the four virtues proposed by Mencius, especially righteousness and propriety. The “four virtues” proposed by Mencius, especially “righteousness” and “propriety”, have resources for creative transformation. “Ritual”, as a code of values that society should uphold, contains thoughts on freedom, equality, and justice. “Righteousness”, as the path of people's behavior, has room for choice, but cannot cross the double red line of personal morality and laws and regulations. At the individual level, socialist core values include patriotism, dedication, honesty and friendliness, and “wisdom” is its spiritual gene. A person with “wisdom” is one who has the ability to distinguish between right and wrong, and has the correct standard of value judgement, i.e., one who is able to differentiate between good and evil, the good and the bad, the beautiful and the ugly. When a person has the characteristics of patriotism, dedication, honesty and friendliness, it is precisely the manifestation of the wise man's style. Entering the new era, “the people are no longer satisfied with the simple needs of material and

cultural life, and have begun to pursue higher and more diversified needs for a better life as their real value pursuit.”<sup>[14]</sup> The essence of modernization is the modernization of human beings, who are the unity of soul and body, material and spiritual needs. Therefore, we should proactively draw experience and wisdom from Mencius' idea of “benevolent governance”, promote the high-quality development of the economy with new quality productive forces, enrich the people's spiritual world with the promotion and practice of socialist core values, so as to realize the comprehensive enrichment of things and the comprehensive development of human beings.

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